1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: The William Wirt House

Other Name/Site Number: The Hancock-Wirt-Caskie House

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 2 North Fifth Street Not for publication:

City/Town: Richmond Vicinity:

State: VA County: Code: 760 Zip Code: 23218

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property		Category of Property	
Private:	X	Building(s):	X
Public-Local:		District:	
Public-State:		Site:	
Public-Federal:		Structure:	
		Object:	

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
		Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing:

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this __X__ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property __X__ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property __X__ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ Entered in the National Register
___ Determined eligible for the National Register
___ Determined not eligible for the National Register
___ Removed from the National Register
___ Other (explain):

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Domestic: single dwelling Sub: Legal / Commerce/Trade: professional (law office)

Current: Commerce/Trade: professional (law office) Sub: Domestic: single dwelling

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: Federal

Materials: Stone, brick, marble

Foundation: Brick
Walls: Brick
Roof: Tin
Other: Marble steps, wood porch, wood entablature, stone lintels, marble steps, and first floor porch

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Summary

The William Wirt House (built 1808-1809, located at 2 North Fifth Street in Richmond, Virginia) is Richmond's only surviving double-bowed house built during the Federal era. Once part of a constellation of twenty-five other bowed houses in Virginia's capital, the William Wirt House is the only one that remains. While the house withstood a series on unsympathetic 19th and early-20th century uses, the present owner has successfully embarked on a now decade-long restoration of the highest caliber. Gently and carefully the present owner has restored missing features and returned the house to its appearance as the distinctive residence occupied by William Wirt, America's longest-serving Attorney General.[1]

Exterior

The William Wirt House is a two-story, hipped roof urban mansion constructed of brick laid in Flemish bond with English bond below the water table. The three bays on either side of the entrance are formed into octagonal-ended or three-sectioned bow front projections with an Adamesque, wooden, two-level loggia screening the central space. The Adamesque arched portico, with its elongated orders – Tuscan on the first floor, Doric on the second -- not only gave the exterior of the house an exceptional central composition, but it affords two additional exterior rooms. Double doors framed access both levels of the loggia with fanlights above. The first-floor porch floor and entrance steps are in marble and the windows on the front and side elevations have scored stone sills. Other features are the brick belt course between the floors and the deep eaves with long, narrow brackets. A standing-seam metal roof covers the building.

Interior

In plan, the William Wirt House departs from that of Virginia's center-hall dwellings in that it is asymmetrical and incorporates polygonal rooms. The southern side of the house is deeper than the northern side. While the northern side houses a single, large, polygonal-ended room on each floor, the southern side contains a pair of rooms, the front room octagonal, the rear rectangular. The small, center stair hall extends only to the depth of the shalloweer, northern side of the house.

The finest room in the house is the octagonal parlor on the first floor, inside the southern bow. The eight walls of room contain four windows, one doorway, one marble chimneypiece, and two "apparent windows." Apparent windows are areas of interior walls that simulate real windows by using mirror panes framed in window casements divided by glazing bars. The apparent windows are located on either side of the chimneypiece and directly across from exterior windows so as to maximize light by reflection. The octagonal parlor also features relief decoration. An elaborate plaster cornice incorporates diamond and octagonal motifs. The frieze of the cornice was adapted from plate XLIIII [sic] of William Pain's The Practical Builder (London, 1774). The door case features delicate composition work with fruit and flower baskets, flower swags, pineapples, and urns. This is the only architectural decoration in the Hancock-Wirt-Caskie House that was made of composition ornament. The door frames are elaborated with octagonal motifs derived from plate XLI of Pain's The Carpenter's and Joiner's Repository (London, 1778). The room also features paneled wainscoting and a detailed ceiling medallion. The plaster ceiling medallions in the octagonal parlor were derived designs by Daniel Raynerd published as plate 36 in Asher Benjamin's The American Builder's Companion (1827). While the original ceiling modillion was removed (probably at the time the house was piped for gas fixtures), ultrasonography

directed by the present owner confirmed the locations of glue points, which conform to the Reynard medallion. The room was originally papered with Dufour's Cupid & Psyche which has been reinstalled.

The dining room is located directly behind the octagonal parlor on the south side of the house. This rectangular room is decorated with an anthemion frieze in the plaster cornice, a chair rail, and marble chimneypiece. Glue points show the original ceiling medallion similar to the oval one in the Philadelphia house "Rockland." The cornice and frieze were adopted from Plate XLI of William Pain's The Practical Builder (London, 1774) based on fragments found in well and ghost marks on walls. The current frieze is a reproduction, modeled (under the direction of the present owner) after fragments recovered after an earlier owner removed it. The triangular spaces left over behind the octagonal walls of the parlor were utilized as service areas for the dining room. Built-in cabinets were used for storage of dishes and utensils. The doorways to these spaces were narrow but with arched openings; doors were never attached to these cases. Three windows light this room, two on the south wall, one on the north. An additional south window lights the triangular service space in the southeast corner of the room. As in the octagonal parlor, the plaster ceiling medallions in the dining room were derived designs by Raynerd published as plate 36 in Benjamin's American Builder's Companion (1827). Again like in the octagonal parlor, the original ceiling modillion was removed (probably at the time the house was piped for gas fixtures), ultrasonography likewise confirmed the locations of glue points, which conformed to the Reynard medallion.

The third first floor reception room is the north parlor, also know as the library. This room was polygonal, with a rectangular end and a semi-octagonal front. The two door cases (the second, a false door to balance the first) are carved wood using a diamond motif frieze that matched that of the plaster cornice in the octagonal parlor, though much narrower. Like the octagonal parlor and the dining room, the frieze of the door frames was adapted from plate XLIIII [sic] of William Pain's The Practical Builder (London, 1774). The room also features a pair of windows on the rear wall flanking the marble chimneypiece.

The stair hall separates the octagonal parlor and dining room from the north parlor. The hall's decoration consists of the front entry doorcase, hall doorcases, and the staircase. A mid-nineteenth century replacement of the front entry resulted in the loss of the original doorcase. No indication of its original treatment survived. The original doorcases for the other three hall doorways remain, however. As in the dining room, the door frames are elaborated with connecting octagonal motifs carved of wood derived from plate XLI of Pain's The Carpenter's and Joiner's Repository (London, 1778). The staircase has delicate scroll brackets at the end of each riser, and each riser is marbelized to resemble King of Prussia marble. The stair was modeled after plate LXVIII of Pain's The Practical Builder, including the balusters and the scroll brackets. On the base of the stair railing on the second floor, the Greek key pattern is adapted from plate XLI of Pain's The Practical Builder. A modified version of the Rockland medallion was identified by glue points as being round, not oval. Cornice and frieze from Plate XLI of Pain's The Practical Builder were based on fragments found in well and ghost marks on the walls.

The second-floor rooms are treated much simpler than the more public first floor rooms. The second-floor octagonal chamber, located directly above the first-floor octagonal parlor, is simply decorated with a small marble chimneypiece and chair rail. There is no cornice. The octagonal

chamber, unlike the octagonal parlor below it, made direct use of the corner spaces behind the octagon. Instead of apparent windows, these spaces have doors. The south angled wall opens into a small triangular closet; the south angled wall forms a connection to the room behind the octagonal chamber, the dining room chamber. The dining room chamber is also plainly decorated with a small marble chimneypiece and chair rail. There is no cornice.

The north parlor chamber or principal bed chamber is the most complex room on the second floor. This room was the same size as the north parlor below, but it has wide arched openings running north and south to divide the bowed area from the rest of the room. The bowed area is further divided into three sections, two closets and a sitting area between them. The closets are located on either side of the arch in the angled sides of the bow. Each closet has shelves and a window for light. The front bow window and the two rear windows in the west wall of the chamber area light the entire room.

The cellar areas are more problematic, due to twentieth-century alterations that included use as an office and bookstore. The original kitchen was located below the dining room. The space below the north parlor was divided into two rooms by a wooden wall. The bowed room likely served as a root cellar since large ceiling hooks remain, indicating that the room was used for food storage. The rear room was probably used as a storeroom or servants quarters.

All original outbuildings except part of one were destroyed in the early twentieth century, when the property to the rear was subdivided and built upon. Since the area to the north of the house still remains and the subsequent insurance policies after the Wirt's departure show the existence of the outbuildings well into the 19th century, there is a potential archaeological project and possible reconstruction of the outbuildings as they existed during Wirt's.

Context

The William Wirt is Richmond's only surviving double-bowed house built during the Federal era. Once part of a series of twenty-five other bowed houses in Virginia's capital, the Wirt House is the only one that remains. These Federal-era bowed houses became popular in Richmond for reasons of both fashion and function. The bows allowed multiple windows and thus light and greater views of gardens, streets, and in some cases, the James River.[2]

The bow (curved as well as polygonal) was introduced into the Richmond architectural scene by Benjamin Henry Latrobe. Latrobe, the English-trained founder of the American architectural profession, lived in Virginia form 1796 to 1798. One of his earliest Richmond projects was the Harvie-Gambel House, the house in which Elizabeth Gamble, the second wife of William Wirt, was raised. For the first owners, the Harvies, Latrobe attempted to create the latest and best in cosmopolitan neoclassical design. Latrobe took a nascent tradition of bow windows in Richmond and took the English idea of a projecting central bow on the garden side and maximized it to take advantage of the striking views of the James. Latrobe expanded the motif of the single bow into a double bow with his design for Clifton, built 1808-9 in Richmond. Latrobe considered the design a critique of his Harvie-Gambel house, and utilized a pair of projecting bows (which he had earlier employed in his Virginia State Penitentiary, Richmond, 1797-1806) to capture commanding views of the city and the James. One innovation at Clifton was to bear architectural fruit in Richmond was the development of the twin bows framing a porch.[3]

This bow began a long series of like adaptations in Richmond, including the Wickham-Valentine House (NHL), designed by Latrobe's informal apprentice Alexander Parris in 1811-13. Other examples include the demolished Moldavia, the childhood home of Edgar Allen Poe, located diagonally across the intersection from the Wirt House.[4] Further Richmond examples include the Alexander McRae House (demolished), which featured the same twin bows framing a porch as Clifton, and which in turn which bore an uncanny resemblance to Lynchburg's Point of Honor, which featured the same double bow framing a porch. Point of Honor and the Wirt House are the only surviving Federal-era double-bowed in Virginia.[5] The William Wirt House is perhaps the most sophisticated example of this Federal-era double-bow tradition in Richmond, and the only one to survive.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
Nationally: X Statewide: __ Locally:

Applicable National
Register Criteria: A__ B_X_ C_X_ D

Criteria Considerations
(Exceptions): A__ B__ C__ D__ E__ F__ G

NHL Criteria: Criterion 2 – associated with life of person of national significance

NHL Theme(s): Expressing Cultural Values, Sites Associated with American Authors

Areas of Significance: Art, Literature, Political

Period(s) of Significance: 1816-1817

Significant Dates: 1817, the year of publication of William Wirt's *Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry*, and his appointment by President James Monroe as Attorney General of the United States

Significant Person(s): William Wirt

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: Unknown

Historic Contexts:

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

Summary

From 1816-1817, the Hancock-Wirt-Caskie House was the home of William Wirt, an influential yet now-overlooked lawyer, author, historian, and Attorney General of the United States. As an attorney, Wirt first rose to fame in 1800 as the youngest member of the defense team (he had practiced law but eight years) in the trial of controversial newspaperman James Callender, prosecuted under the antagonistic Alien & Sedition Acts. His reputation expanded with his successful defense in the high-profile George Wythe murder case in 1806. In 1807, Wirt became the youngest of the prosecution team in the treason trial of former Vice-President Aaron Burr. The prosecution team included Wirt, U.S. Attorney for Virginia George Hay, Virginia Lt. Gov. Alexander MacRae, and much of the legal strategy came directly from Thomas Jefferson; the defense team included former U.S. Attorney General Edmund Randolph and influential Richmond lawyer John Wickham. The case was tried before Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court John Marshall in Circuit Court held in Richmond. While Burr was acquitted, Wirt's four-hour summation of the "Blennerhassett Affair" remains a notable example of courtroom oratory.

As an author, Wirt first achieved notice for the satirical series of essays *The British Spy* (1802) and later for *The Old Bachelor* (1812). Wirt's most lasting literary and historical contribution was his monumental *Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry* (1817), which required 12 years to complete and is the basis on which much of the knowledge of Patrick Henry rests. Wirt consulted many prominent Virginians who knew Henry, including Thomas Jefferson, and Governor Mann Page. He also consulted letters, records of the General Court, and archives of the state in attempt to reconstruct the words of Patrick Henry, including Henry's most famous, his "Give me liberty, or give me death" oration. No other record of this speech exists.

Immediately following the publication of *Patrick Henry*, Wirt was named U.S. Attorney General, and relocated to Washington, D.C. There, he served presidents James Monroe and John Quincy Adams as Attorney General from 1817 to 1829, becoming the first Attorney General to hold Cabinet rank. Wirt argued several cases that came to define American jurisprudence. As Attorney General, Wirt argued such landmark cases before the U.S. Supreme Court and Chief Justice John Marshall as *McCullough v. Maryland*, *Dartmouth College v. Woodward, Gibbons v. Ogden*; after his return to private practice, Wirt re-entered the Supreme Court to argue the two landmark *Cherokee* cases. All of these cases were instrumental defining the division of authority between branches of the U.S. Government, clarifying the relations between the several states and the United States, and bringing to the fore issues of state sovereignty. In the course of his career, Wirt argued some 174 cases before the Supreme Court. The William Wirt House is the only surviving historic resource associated with the life of William Wirt.

Though largely forgotten today, William Wirt exerted a powerful formative influence upon both our understanding of Patrick Henry's role in the American Revolution, as well as shaping United States legal culture in its early, impressionable days. Wirt remains the longest serving Attorney General in U.S. history.

Statement of Significance

Born 8 November 1772 the son of an innkeeper in Bladensburg, Maryland, Wirt was orphaned by the time he was eight years old. He was raised by an aunt and educated in a series of boarding schools in Georgetown. After a stint as a tutor, at the age of 20 Wirt moved to Virginia and was soon -- with minimal training --

admitted to the Virginia Bar. As a young man, he was befriended by Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe, and encouraged and mentored by them. Through the instigation of his mentors, Wirt was appointed Clerk of the Virginia House of Delegates when he was 28, and became Chancellor of the Eastern District of Virginia at age 30. He served in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1808-10. In 1816, President Madison appointed him U.S. District Attorney for Virginia. From 1817 to 1829, Wirt served two presidents, Monroe and John Quincy Adams, as U.S. Attorney General. He was the first Attorney General to hold cabinet rank and the first to keep a permanent record of his decisions. Throughout his life, Wirt maintained a busy legal practice; between cases argued as Attorney General and in private practice, Wirt argued some 174 cases before the Supreme Court, including many which form the foundation of American legal culture.[6]

William Wirt lived an ambitious and restless existence, one that is in many ways revealing of the yearnings of Americans who came of age in the generation following the War for Independence. United States Attorney General and one-time candidate for President, William Wirt was a nationally prominent lawyer and public official; now, he is barely acknowledged in the public memory. As historian Andrew Burstein recently wrote of Wirt:

> If the Americans of 1826 were a people of longings, underappreciated by later historians, no better symbol exists to warrant their resuscitation than William Wirt. A name known to very few by the twentieth century, he was once a nationally prominent figure – indeed a virtuoso. Author of fiction and biography, a famed trial attorney who argued several of the most significant Supreme Court cases of his era, he also holds a record for government service that remains unbroken, as U.S. attorney general for 12 successive years, through the administrations of James Monroe and John Quincy Adams.[7]

Early Life

William Wirt was born 8 November 1772 in Bladensburg, Maryland, the son of Jacob Wirt, a Swiss tavernkeeper, and his wife Henrietta. The youngest of eight siblings, Wirt was orphaned by the time he was eight years old. Raised by an aunt, he spent much of his young life in a series of boarding schools. Much of Wirt's career was spent in an effort to rise above this inauspicious beginning; indeed, Wirt was seemingly never satisfied with any of his achievements, and was always seeking something slightly out of view, if not out of reach.

Wirt's early life plagued him throughout his life: no matter what he did, or how successful he became (and he was, by any account, at the very pinnacle of his profession), he always felt the stalking horse of poverty: he simply never felt secure. As Burstein described the predicament:

> In the prime of his life, while maintaining household slaves and supporting a large family, William Wirt employed himself in every way he could: he wrote from the heart, gave public speeches, peripatetically advertised his legal services, argued cases before the Supreme Court – and despite it all never felt that business was sufficient to meet expenses or fulfill his honorable ambition. The more he earned, and the more visible his public presence, the more an inner contentment seemed to elude him.[8]

The Beginnings of a Legal Career

By the young age of fifteen, Wirt had depleted his modest inheritance, and struck out to support himself. The next few years were spent earning his keep as a somewhat peripatetic tutor, but Wirt realized that this was no way of wealth, and yearned for more. At the age of twenty, and after a scant seventeen months of legal training under Thomas Swann of Fredericksburg, Wirt set off in the fall of 1792 for Culpeper Courthouse to begin his

legal career. As one biographer explained it, "Armed with a 'legal library' consisting of, by his own admission, one copy of *Blackstone*, two volumes of *Don Quixote*, and one volume of *Tristam Shandy,"* Wirt founded his legal career not on a sound legal education, but upon his magnetic public presence and a gift for oratory.[9] And so, with minimal training and great charm, was admitted to the Virginia Bar in 1792.

As a young lawyer, Wirt was not noted for a discernibly studious nature, nor was his attention to legal details remarked upon; Wirt instead preferred to rely on his prodigious gifts as an orator and ability to sway a jury through moral, if not legal arguments. (This aspect of Wirt's character, no doubt, inclined his later attraction to Patrick Henry who notably possessed exactly the same personal and professional qualities.) As Wirt's biographer, former law student John Pendleton Kennedy, recalled in his *Memoirs of the Life of William Wirt* (2 vols., 1849), Wirt was "more disposed to cultivate the congenial pleasures of good-fellowship, than to pursue, by any painful toil, the road to fame." But thanks to his easy manner, his charismatic courtroom presence, and increasingly valuable social connections, Wirt's legal practice thrived. Gradually, almost inexorably, Wirt extended his practice into neighboring Albemarle County.

Establishing a pattern Wirt was to follow throughout his life, Wirt felt that the income produced by his legal practice alone was not sufficient. So, to augment his practice, he became a tutor for the 13 children of Henry Fry. (Henry Fry's father Joshua was a College of William and Mary mathematician, a member of the House of Burgesses, and the surveyor who, with Thomas Jefferson's father Peter, produced the famed Fry and Jefferson map of Virginia.) Wirt gradually gained entrée to intellectual and social circles in Culpeper, Orange, and Albemarle Counties.[10] But it was through Wirt's law practice that he came in contact with the family of Dr. George Gilmer that was to change the direction of his life.

Dr. George Gilmer, of Pen Park, near Charlottesville, was one of Albemarle County's most eminent residents. Gilmer studied medicine in Edinburgh, and maintained a large and lucrative practice, counting among his patients Thomas Jefferson. Gilmer served with distinction in the colonial House of Burgesses. He was an early and steadfast supporter of independence, serving as a leading member of the 1774 Citizens Committee, a lieutenant of the Albemarle Volunteers, pursuading his unit in the spring of 1775 to march on Williamsburg in a show of force against Lord Dunmore. He fought with distinction in the Revolutionary War, served on the Virginia Constitutional Committee, and helped draft the Virginia Declaration of Rights. He went on to represent Albemarle in the House of Delegates, and remained a close friend and political ally of Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe.[11] Gilmer was, in short, the very embodiment of the social and intellectual establishment of Piedmont Virginia. Just three years after his admission to the Virginia Bar, with his legal practice and tutoring duties extending into Albemarle County, Wirt met and fell in love with George Gilmer's eldest daughter, Mildred.

Social Acceptance

Following their wedding on 28 May 1795 at Pen Park, William and Mildred Gilmer moved in with her father's family at Pen Park. This fortuitous marriage proved to be Wirt's entry to the rarified world of Piedmont elite. Wirt longed for social acceptance, and strove to fit into the Jeffersonian mold of a gentlemanly lawyer and man of letters. Soon, Wirt found himself performing legal work for Thomas Jefferson, and quickly found himself admitted to Jefferson's orbit, where Wirt was to remain throughout the elder statesman's lifetime. The orbit quickly expanded to include Monroe and Madison. In Wirt, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe found "a willing listener and an ardent supporter of their political views. In return, they encouraged and prodded their young protégé to parlay his legal and rhetorical skills into a more public life than he envisioned or desired."[12] Wirt's social circles also included the young lawyer James Barbour, who was to go one to serve in the House of Delegates and become Governor of Virginia; later, Wirt and Barbour would serve together in President John Quincy Adams's Cabinet, Barbour as Secretary of War, Wirt as Attorney General. Wirt was especially close to

Dr. George Gilmer's fourth son Francis, who was educated under Jefferson's direction and later studied law under Wirt.[13]

Wirt appears to have led a rather unbridled life in the 1790s, focussed upon the more social aspects of his life. Even John Pendleton Kennedy, Wirt's adoring biographer, alluded to his excesses: "I do not wish to conceal the fact that at this time of the life of Mr. Wirt, he was not altogether free from the censure of having sometime yielded to the spells of the tempter and fallen into some occasional irregularities of conduct. I am aware that this charge has been made in graver form, with some amplitude of detail and circumstance …."[14] The gaiety and sociability of Wirt's Albemarle life was not destined to last long. On 17 September 1799, his beloved wife Mildred Gilmer Wirt died, just five years into their marriage. Wirt's rapid rise in the Albemarle gentry was cut short. While Wirt remained on good terms with his in-laws (later taking on his younger brother-in-law Francis Gilmer as a law student), Wirt felt the need to leave Albemarle County, and though George Gilmer encouraged him to stay at Pen Park, Wirt quickly departed for Richmond.

The Move to Richmond

At the age of twenty-seven, the recently widowed Wirt was supported and encouraged by his Albemarle mentors. With the support of Jefferson (former Governor and Vice-President, then preparing for his second bid for the Presidency) Madison (a Delegate), and Monroe (Governor), Wirt was elected the Clerk of the House of Delegates. His re-established private law practice flourished in the Capitol. Wirt was re-elected twice, serving as Clerk until 1802. On Jefferson's recommendation, Wirt served as counsel in the sedition trial of the notorious James Callender, a one-time Jefferson-supporter and journalist, accused of libel under the onerous Alien and Sedition Acts. While Wirt ultimately lost the case (in a heavily Federalist court), his arguments proved popular in staunchly Republican Virginia.[15] In 1802 the House of Delegates appointed the thirty year-old Wirt Chancellor of the Eastern District of Virginia.

In 1803, four years after the death of his first wife, Wirt married Elizabeth Gamble, daughter of a prominent and powerful Richmond family. With the first of twelve children on the way, Wirt resigned the Chancellorship, citing the "iron hand of want" that gripped those who lived on the small state salaries. This was to be a pattern throughout Wirt's career: the tension between the lucrative private practice he maintained, and the public adulation that came with elected or appointed public office. While Wirt felt the same call to public service as Jefferson and Madison, he had no personal fortune to augment the paltry salaries Virginia public officials received for their labors.

It was also in the year of his second marriage that Wirt instigated his writing career. In September of 1803, he published the first of a series of satirical biographical sketches in the Richmond *Argus* under the moniker "The British Spy." "The Letters of the British Spy" attracted significant literary attention to the thirty year old Wirt, who from that point strove for literary fame, as well as legal prominence. These were followed in 1804-5 by "The Rainbow Association," a series of 26 essays written by Wirt and others. In 1808, he published a powerful defense of his friend and mentor James Madison. Also, from 1810 to 1813, Wirt and colleagues wrote 33 "Old Bachelor" essays. From the publication of "The Letters of the British Spy" until his death, Wirt pursued literary fame.

It was through his law practice, however, that Wirt became best known in the early years of his career in Richmond. His reputation expanded with his successful defense in the high-profile George Wythe murder case in 1806. In 1807, Wirt became the youngest of the prosecution team in the treason trial of former Vice-President Aaron Burr. (The present owner of the house, Aubrey R. Bowles, III, is a descendent of Aaron Burr; he is the great, great, grandson of Burr's niece.) The prosecution team included Wirt, U.S. Attorney for Virginia George Hay, Virginia Lt. Gov. Alexander MacRae; much of the legal strategy came from Thomas

Jefferson. The defense team included former U.S. Attorney General Edmund Randolph and influential Richmond lawyer John Wickham. The case was tried before Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court John Marshall in Circuit Court held in Richmond; the almost unbelievable proceedings transfixed the nation. The trial attracted such a huge crowd, it had to be moved to Jefferson's Capitol. Among the spectators was a young Winfield Scott. A young Washington Irving covered the trial for a New York newspaper. Andrew Jackson inflamed the crowd around the Capitol, denouncing President Jefferson's "political persecution" of Burr, his own Vice-President. Jefferson was subpoenaed to testify to his role in the pursuit and arrest of Burr, the first time a sitting president had been subpoenaed to testify in court. Under the advice of Secretary of State Madison, Jefferson pled prior commitments and did not testify. Marshall did not pursue the subpoena, but asserted his right to subpoena the President, establishing a legal precedent recently revisited.

Thousands – both supporters and enemies of Burr -- swelled Capitol Square to catch a glimpse of the spectacle of a Vice-President of the United States on trial for treason. Burr was ultimately acquitted, but his reputation never recovered. Wirt's four-hour summation of the "Blennerhassett Affair" remains a notable example of courtroom oratory. (The Affair was named for Blennerhassett Island, the island on which the plan to divide the western lands from the United States and establish them as a new nation under the leadership of Aaron Burr was formulated during a meeting, at which Burr was or was not present, a meeting which he did or did not instigate, depending upon whether one believed the defense or the prosecution.)

The Patrick Henry Biography

Wirt's most lasting literary and historical contribution was his monumental *Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry* (1817), which required 12 years to complete and is the basis on which much knowledge of Patrick Henry rests. Wirt consulted many prominent Virginians who knew Henry, including Thomas Jefferson, Governor Mann Page and also consulted letters, records of the General Court, and archives of the state in attempt to reconstruct the words of Patrick Henry, including the most famous, his "Give me liberty, or give me death" oration. No other record of this speech exists.

The Patrick Henry biography was intended to be the first of a series on the Founding Fathers, but Wirt's law career diverted him from his literary pursuits, and his plans to retire and devote himself to letters was thwarted by his death at age 62. In myriad ways, the Henry biography came to define Wirt's life. Wirt threw himself into the project with zeal, and a withering sense that the connections with the Revolutionary generation – as embodied in the character of his esteemed former father-in-law – were being severed daily, as the leaders of the movement found their way inexorably to the grave. Wirt described the beginnings of the project:

> It was in the summer of 1805, that the design of writing this biography was first conceived. It was produced by an incident of feeling, which, however it affected the author at the time, might now be thought light and trivial by the reader; and he shall not, therefore, be detained by the recital of it. The author knew nothing of Mr. Henry, personally. He had never seen him; and was of course compelled to rely wholly on the information of others. As soon, therefore, as the design was formed of writing his life, aware of the necessity of losing no time in collecting, from the few remaining coevals of Mr. Henry, that personal knowledge of the subject which might ere long be expected to die with them, the author dispatched letters to every quarter of the state in which it occurred to him as probably that interesting information might be found; and he was gratified by the prompt attention which was paid to his inquiries.[16]

Wirt consulted many prominent Virginians who knew Henry, including Thomas Jefferson, Governor Mann Page, and he examined Edmund Randolph's manuscript history of Virginia. Wirt also consulted newspapers from 1765 to the close of the Revolution, to correct dates and verify facts, read original letters, consulted

records of the General Court, and perused the archives of the state. Among his correspondents was Thomas Jefferson – no friend of Henry – who supplied information and read the completed manuscript. As Wirt described his participation, "Mr. Jefferson, too, has exercised his well-known kindness and candour on this occasion; having not only favoured the author with a very full communication in the first instance; but assisted him, subsequently and repeatedly, with his able counsel in reconciling apparent contradictions, and clearing away difficulties of fact."[17]

Wirt became consumed by the project, viewing his work as the establishment of a vital connection to the dead and dying heroes who birthed the new nation.[18] He began collecting materials in 1805, but it was not until 1814 that he had amassed and corrected enough source material to begin assembling in earnest Henry's life.

> Although it has been so long since the collection of these materials was begun, it was not until the summer of 1814 that the last communication was received. Even then, when the author sat down to the task of imbodying his materials, there were so many intricacies to disentangle, and so many inconsistencies, from time to time, to explain and settle, and that, too, through the tedious agency of cross-mails, that his progress was continually impeded, and has been, to him, most painfully retarded.[19]

While deep in the throes of the *Henry* manuscript, in January 1816, Elizabeth Wirt was looking for a house in the Monroe Ward of Richmond, and wrote her husband of the neighborhood.[20] What she found was the house built by Michael Hancock, which soon became the Wirt's. It was in this house –known as the William Wirt House – that Wirt completed the formidable task of compiling and editing the biography. And it was in this house that Wirt completed the biography and finished the very last portion, the preface, on 5 September 1817.

It is difficult to underestimate the importance of Wirt's biography of Patrick Henry, a biography that came to fruition in the Wirt house. Henry left behind few papers, and his most important speeches and courtroom orations were never written down – by Henry or anyone else. Without Wirt's twelve-year pursuit of the life of Henry, we would know little of what Henry said. Wirt saw Henry as the embodiment of the spirit of the Revolutionary generation, a John the Baptist for those who sought independence. As Wirt described Henry: "His was a spirit fitted to raise the whirlwind, as well as to ride in and direct it."[21] All of Henry's most famous pronouncements, such as Henry's famous belief that he had 'but one lamp by which his feet were guided; and that lamp was the lamp of experience. He knew of no way of judging of the future but by the past"[22] (the words inscribed on the façade of the Virginia Historical Society) are known only through Wirt's reconstruction of them. But none of Henry's speeches are more famous than that loosened in St. John's Church, Richmond, on 20 March 1775.

Wirt's account of "Give me Liberty …"

By 1775, boycotts of British goods had spread throughout Britain's American colonies. Virginia's royal governor, John Murray, fourth earl of Dunmore, had convened the House of Burgesses in November 1774 but then prorogued or dissolved it when he learned that several of its members were leaders of the boycott. This had happened before, and the Burgesses had reconvened as private citizens in convention at the Raleigh Tavern in Williamsburg. Late in the winter of 1774–1775, however, they decided to meet in Richmond, far from the grasp of Dunmore.

The delegates chose to hold their meeting in the Henrico Parish church (later St. John's Episcopal Church), a simple frame structure completed in 1741. The 120 or so members of the second revolutionary convention crowded into the church on March 20, 1775, and began to reconsider their options, since the nonimportation association, or boycott, had failed to stir Parliament and the Crown. Patrick Henry, member for Hanover

County and a fiery orator, offered a resolution to put the colony into a defensive posture by raising an armed force. When several conservative delegates objected to his resolution as a virtual declaration of war, Henry responded with a speech that galvanized the convention.

Future generations of American schoolchildren have come to know Henry's oration as the "Liberty or Death" speech. According to Wirt, he began quietly, pointing out that reasonable men might hope that the assembly's repeated remonstrances would move the King and Parliament to lift the burdens they had imposed on the colonies, but recent history had shown otherwise. For ten years, the colonists had begged and pleaded and argued, but to no avail. There was nothing left but to fight—to take up arms, train the militia, and trust in God for support. Henry's voice rose as he came to his conclusion:

> Gentlemen may cry, peace, peace—but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, . . . give me liberty or give me death! [23]

After a few moments of stunned silence, Richard Henry Lee rose to offer a motion seconding Henry's resolution. Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Nelson, Jr., followed with supporting speeches. When the vote was taken, Henry's resolution passed, 65 to 60, and the colony began to prepare for war. As Henry had prophesied, "the next gale" that swept from the north brought news of the fighting at Lexington and Concord, and so the war began.

Henry had not written his speech in advance, nor was it transcribed at the time, and contemporary witnesses wrote precious little about it in their diaries and letters. It echoed in their minds, however, until in the first quarter of the next century a budding biographer of Henry contacted them to ask their help in reconstructing the speech. The reconstructed text first appeared in print in November 1817, when William Wirt's biography of the orator was published. Before long, some critics charged that the famous speech was as much a product of Wirt's imagination as the cherry tree story was a fantasy of Washington's early biographer, Parson Weems.

The evidence, as set forth by Robert Douthat Meade in his Henry biography, suggests otherwise. Wirt took care to contact everyone he could find who was present when the speech was delivered, reconstructed the address based on what the witnesses told him, and even circulated a draft for comment and correction. Portions of the speech were certainly inspired by Joseph Addison's widely read *Cato* (1713, Act X, scene X, which George Washington – no lover of the theater – ordered be perfomed for his troops at Valley Forge). The scene culminates with "My voice is still for war. / Gods! can a Roman senate long debate / Which of the two to choose, slavery or death?"

Although Wirt's research occurred some forty-two years after the event, the witnesses agreed that he had captured the gist of Henry's comments. Even Thomas Jefferson, no Henry supporter, returned the draft unmarked. Meade concluded that the speech as rendered by Wirt is probably more accurate than not, and that "the information on the text as a whole is more precise than for many other great speeches of history."

In late 1817, following quickly on the success of his *Life of Patrick Henry,* Wirt was chosen to become United States attorney General by President James Monroe, which necessitated the family's move to Washington in the winter of 1817. The Wirts left Richmond without selling their house, renting it to Judge William Cabell, Elizabeth's brother-in-law and William's close friend who had assisted him with transcribing recollections for

his *Life of Patrick Henry*[24]. On 2 March 1818, the Wirts sold their home to Benjamin Tate, and did not return to Richmond.

Attorney General

Immediately following the publication of *Patrick Henry*, Wirt was named U.S. Attorney General, and relocated to Washington, D.C. There, he served presidents James Monroe and John Quincy Adams as Attorney General from 1817 to 1829, becoming the first Attorney General to hold Cabinet rank. Wirt argued several cases that came to define American jurisprudence. As Attorney General, Wirt argued such landmark cases before the U.S. Supreme Court and Chief Justice John Marshall as *McCullough v. Maryland*, *Cohens v. Virginia, Dartmouth College v. Woodward, Gibbons v. Ogden*; and *Brown v. Maryland*; after his return to private practice, Wirt re-entered the Supreme Court to argue the two *Cherokee* cases. All of these cases were instrumental in the definition of the division of authority between branches of the U.S. Government, and in clarifying the relations between the several states and the United States, and brought to the fore issues of state sovereignty. In the course of his career, Wirt argued some 174 cases before the Supreme Court.

One of Wirt's most enduring legal contributions was a virtual transformation of the role of the Attorney General. The Judiciary Act of 1789 established the Office of the Attorney General, calling for the appointment of "a meet person, learned in the law, to act as attorney-general for the United States."[25] The Act provides that the duty of the Attorney General "shall be to prosecute and conduct all suits in the Supreme Court in which the United States shall be concerned, and to give his advice and opinion upon questions of law when required by the President of the United States, or when requested by the heads of any of the departments." The 1789 Act did not give the Attorney General Cabinet rank. President George Washington soon discovered that he needed the Attorney General to be present at Cabinet meetings because of the legal aspects that often arose in their discussions. While the Attorney General was a regular presence at Cabinet meetings, it was not until James Monroe's appointment of Wirt to the position that the position was elevated to a Cabinet-level appointment.

Originally, the Office of the Attorney General was a one-person, part-time position. The workload of the Attorney General quickly became too much for one person, necessitating the hiring of several assistants. In addition to litigation, the Attorney General issued opinions on a wide range of subjects constituting a body of legal precedent. In the early years, Congress asked the Attorney General to act as its counselor and issue opinions for its intended actions. Giving opinions to the President, to the heads of the executive departments, and to Congress proved too taxing and full of potential conflict for the Attorney General. In 1819 Wirt sent a letter to President Monroe informing him that from that time forward the Office of the Attorney General would operate pursuant to the Judiciary Act of 1789 and give opinions only to the President and to the heads of the executive departments. This has remained policy to the present day.

Wirt's tenure as Attorney General not only saw the reorganization of the office into the professional office it is today, but he argued some of the most significant cases to appear before the Marshall Court – indeed, before the Supreme Court at any time. One of the first major cases Wirt was to argue was *McCulloch v. Maryland*, which concerned the constitutionality of the United States Bank, chartered by Congress in 1817. The case argued by Wirt successfully established three precedent-setting legal principles: 1) that the people of the United States are collectively sovereign, and the states are not themselves separately sovereign, 2) that the Congressional act chartering the Bank was constitutional, because the powers of the Federal government, while limited, are supreme within its sphere of action, and 3) that Maryland could not tax the Bank, as the states have no power of taxation to impede, burden, or control the operation of constitutional laws passed by Congress. *McCulloch v. Maryland* was a landmark case in the centralization of power at the expense of the states. In *Dartmouth College v. Woodward*, Wirt successfully argued the proposition that the constitution protected private property from attacks by the states. Issues of national sovereignty versus state's rights again came to the fore in 1824, in

Gibbons v. Ogden, better known as the New York Steamboat Case. Wirt's case not only smashed a state-chartered monopoly, but it mapped out the course Congress would follow for interstate commerce for the next century. Many of the most defining cases of the Marshall Court were successfully argued by William Wirt.

Wirt's reputation as a lawyer was such that in April 1826, Jeffferson offered Wirt a chair in the College of Law and the presidency of the University of Virginia. Wirt declined, once again citing the need to pursue "the more profitable labors of my profession: to be found in private practice." Jefferson was so eager to secure Wirt's services that he agreed to allow the position of president to be created specifically for Wirt, but to no avail. (Jefferson was otherwise adamant that there be no president of the University of Virginia; after this brief flirtation, the issue was not revisited until the appointment of the first president, Edwin Alderman, in 1904.) Such was Wirt's reputation for oratory, and his position as chronicler of the Revolutionary generation, that he was selected to deliver the speech that became a famous eulogy in the House of Representatives on the deaths of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson on the Fourth of July, 1826.

Later in life, and still in private practice, Wirt contributed his considerable skills as a lawyer and orator to the anti-Jacksonian cause. Wirt emerged as a champion of the Supreme Court at a time when Jacksonian Democrats and states' rights advocates were growing increasingly resentful of the broad powers exercised by the judicial branch. In early 1830, Wirt represented New Jersey in that state's long-standing boundary dispute with New York, a case that foreshadowed the tendency of other states to openly disregard the rulings of the Supreme Court. Wirt also brought forward the *Cherokee* cases of 1831 and 1832, two Indian land right cases that touched on the relation of the states to the Federal government, the authority of the Supreme Court, and the inviolability of treaties made under the Constitution. Wirt successfully argued that Georgia's attempts to enforce its laws on the Cherokee Nation were unconstitutional. Jackson refused to enforce the decision, furthering Wirt's distrust of him. Increasingly, and in part because of his dislike of Jacksonian politics, Wirt became increasingly conservative, a shift that allowed him to negotiate between Republican and Federalist administrations (and continue as a Cabinet appointee from the Monroe administration to that of John Quincy Adams). Interestingly, this gradual transformation from a Jeffersonian Republican to a more conservative political stance mirrored that of Patrick Henry, who gradually traded fiery revolutionary oratory for a late-life embrace of the Federalist agenda. Reluctantly, in October 1831, Wirt accepted the nomination of the anti-Masonic party for the presidency. Quixotic as this run might seem in hindsight, it was rooted in the belief that Jackson was a demagogic usurper who threatened the institutions of the country, and that by running, Wirt might help to deny Jackson a second term. He was unsuccessful, and the run was to be his last foray into national politcs.

Wirt remained in Washington, D.C., practicing law until the end of his life, arguing such significant issues before the Supreme Court as the *Cherokee* cases. Wirt eagerly sought to retire early to resume his writing career, including continuing his dream of a series of biographies of the Founding Fathers. That dream that was thwarted by his premature death, after a short illness, on 18 February 1834, at the age of 62.

Conclusion

Though largely forgotten today, William Wirt exerted a powerful formative influence upon both our understanding of Patrick Henry's role in the American Revolution, as well as shaping United States legal culture in its early, impressionable days. Wirt remains the longest serving Attorney General in U.S. history. He served as a bridge between the generation of the Revolution and that of early nineteenth century America, conveying both the content and the spirit of 1776 to a new generation. As historian Burstein describes Wirt:

> Wirt arguably did more than anyone else of his generation to link the Romantic movement in

> America with the Revolutionary spirit. When all was said and done, it was Wirt whom the city of Washington selected to cap off the season of observances in 1826 with a masterful oration in the U.S. Capitol – Wirt, who had devoted his public career to furthering the work of the founders; Wirt, who admitted to having 'wept like a child' on reading newspaper accounts of Lafayette's welcome in 1824; Wirt, whose serialized essays, *Letters of the British Spy*, had much earlier established for him a reputation as a patriot susceptible to outbursts of emotion in defense of the national heart. But it was his *Life of Patrick Henry*, first published in 1817 (the same year that he received his appointment to the cabinet), that delivered the pathos and poignancy which gave him the credentials for conveying the general spectacle of the nation's jubilee.[26]

From his humble birth in Bladensburg, to his early legal career in Culpeper, to his serendipitous introduction into the circles of Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe, Wirt doggedly sought acceptance into the social circles of Piedmont Virginia. Though the support of his mentors, Wirt was appointed Clerk of the Virginia House of Delegates at 28, and became Chancellor of the Eastern District of Virginia at age 30. He served in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1808-10. In 1816, President Madison appointed him U.S. District Attorney for Virginia. From 1817 to 1829, Wirt served two presidents, Monroe and John Quincy Adams, as U.S. Attorney General. He was the first Attorney General to hold Cabinet rank, and the first to keep a permanent record of his decisions. Throughout his life, Wirt maintained a busy legal practice; between cases argued as Attorney General and in private practice, Wirt argued some 174 cases before the Supreme Court, including many which form the foundation of American legal culture.[27] William Wirt led a restless and singular life, one that has left a formidable – and inexplicably overlooked – imprint upon American society.

National Register and National Historic Landmark Criteria

The resource meets National Register Criteria B (politics and government as well as literature) and Criteria C (architecture). This National Historic Landmark Nomination is being submitted under Criteria 2 for its association with the life of a person of national significance, with the areas of significance of art, literature, and politics. The resource fits within two existing NHL Themes, "Expressing Cultural Values," and "Sites Associated with American Authors."

The William Wirt House is an integral part of a constellation of architecturally and historically significant resources in Richmond, all of which are National Historic Landmarks. For example, the Virginia State Capitol (NHL 1960) begun in 1785 to the designs of Thomas Jefferson, Wirt's Albemarle County and Richmond mentor. It was in the Capitol that Wirt first worked as Clerk of the House of Delegates, a position arranged by Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe, on his arrival in Richmond in 1799. While developing his legal practice in Richmond, Wirt no doubt spent time in the nearby (just a few blocks from his own residence) newly-completed Executive Mansion (NHL 1988) first occupied 1813 by his Albemarle County friend Governor James Barbour. Barbour would later join Wirt in President John Quincy Adams's Cabinet as Secretary of War. Also in the immediate neighborhood of Wirt's home was the home of his rival attorney (and opposing counsel in the Aaron Burr case) John Wickham (the Wickham-Valentine House, NHL 1971). Even closer to Wirt's home was that of John Marshall, the John Marshall House (NHL 1960), who presided over the Burr treason case, and before whom Wirt argued most of his 174 Supreme Court cases. Two nearby National Historic Landmark churches also figured prominently into Wirt's life. The newly-completed parish church for Wirt's neighborhood was Robert Mills's Monumental Church (NHL 1971). And the church that perhaps had the greatest impact upon Wirt's professional life and literary reputation was Richmond's St. John's Episcopal Church (NHL 1961), the site of Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty" speech around which so much of Wirt's life was to revolve. The William Wirt House is an integral part – historically and architecturally – of this distinguished roster of National Historic landmark-listed historic resources in Richmond.

The occupation of the Wirt family of this resource coincides with the most significant date in William Wirt's august career, 1817. That year, 1817, saw both the publication of Wirt's *Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry* and his appointment by President James Monroe as Attorney General of the United States. The William Wirt House is the only surviving architectural resource associated with the life of William Wirt, and the Wirt occupation coincides with the most significant year of his professional and political career. Therefore, the resource is a worthy candidate for elevation to National Historic Landmark status as a fitting monument to the life of this important American lawyer, author, and attorney general.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

__ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
_X_ Previously Listed in the National Register: VDHR#127-0042 (listed 4/17/1970)
__ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
__ Designated a National Historic Landmark.
_X_ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: VA-113 / HABS, VA,44-RICH,2-
__ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record:

Primary Location of Additional Data:

_X_ State Historic Preservation Office
_X_ Other State Agency: The Library of Virginia
__ Federal Agency
__ Local Government
__ University
_X_ Other (Specify Repository): The Maryland Historical Society, The Virginia Historical Society

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: 1/4 acre

UTM References:	**Zone**	**Easting**	**Northing**
Richmond	18	284,399.28	4,157,419.16

Verbal Boundary Description:
The boundary description for the William Wirt House is
City of Richmond Tax Parcel Map Reference Number W0000023011

Boundary Justification:
These boundaries include the land historically associated with the William Wirt House.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

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November 4, 2002

Endnotes

[1] For a more detailed physical description of the Wirt house, see Karri Lynn Jurgens,"The Hancock-Wirt-Caskie House, Richmond, 1808-1809." Thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2000.
[2] Karri L. Jurgens, "Alexander McRae House," in Bryan Clark Green, Calder Loth, and William M.S. Rasmussen, *Lost Virginia: Vanished Architecture of the Old Dominion* (Charlottesville: Virginia Historical Society – Howell Press, 2001), 51.
[3] Brownell and Jurgens, "Clifton," *Lost Virginia*, 50-1.
[4] Charles E. Brownell, "Harvie-Gambrel House," *Lost Virginia,*39-40, and Brownell and Jurgens, "Moldavia," *Lost Virginia*, 41.
[5] Jurgens, "Alexander McRae House," *Lost Virginia,* 51.
[6]Gregory K. Glassner,. *Adopted Son: The Life, Wit & Wisdom of William Wirt, 1772–1834*. (Hood, Va.: Kurt-Ketner Publishing Co., 1997), 1-2.
[7] Andrew Burstein*, America's Jubilee: A Generation Remembers the Revolution after Fifty Years of Independence.* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 34.
[8] Burstein*,* 36-7.
[9] Glassner, 12.
[10] Glassner, 14.
[11] Glassner, 16; Gilmer Family File, Albemarle County Historical Society.

[12] Glassner, 17; John Pendleton Kennedy, *Memoirs of the Life of William Wirt, Attorney General of the United States* 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1849), I: 63-73.
[13] Glassner, 18.
[14] Kennedy I, 66-68.
[15] After his election to the Presidency, Jefferson pardoned Callender, but did not secure for him the political sinecure Callender believed he deserved; in revenge, the journalist published the first article charging Jefferson with conducting a long-term affair with a young slave in his possession, a woman who would be later identified as Sally Hemmings.
[16] William Wirt, "Preface," *Life of Patrick Henry* (1817. Rpt. Philadelphia: John H. Winston Co., n.d.), v-vi.
[17] Wirt, "Preface," *Life of Patrick Henry*, x.
[18] A significant portion of Wirt's interest in Henry was surely personal. Wirt's description of young Henry as "So far was he, indeed, from exhibiting any one prognostic of this greatness, that every omen foretold a life, at best, of mediocrity, if not insignificance. His person is represented as having been coarse, his manners uncommonly awkward, his dress slovenly, his conversation very plain, his aversion to study invincible, and his faculties almost entirely benumbed by indolence," could easily have been an autobiographical description of the young William Wirt. Wirt, *Life of Patrick Henry*, 24
[19] Wirt, "Preface*," Life of Patrick Henry*, v-xiii.
[20] Elizabrth Wirt to William Wirt, Washington, D.C., 12 January 1816, William Wirt Papers, 1786-1850, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Maryland. Microfilm edition, 1985.
[21] Wirt, *Life of Patrick Henry*, 137.
[22] Wirt, *Life of Patrick Henry*, 138-139.
[23] Wirt, *Life of Patrick Henry*, 141-2.
[24] Wirt, "Preface," *Life of Patrick Henry*, ix.
[25] Judiciary Act of 1789, ch. 20, sec. 35, 1 Stat. 73, 92-93 (1789)
[26] Burstein, 35; Wirt to Dabney Carr, 20 August 1815, in Kennedy, *Memoirs of the Life of William Wirt*, I:388.
[27] Glassner, 1-2.